

September 2, 2025

The Hon. Mayor Kirk Watson
The Hon. Mayor Pro Tem Vanessa Fuentes
Hon. Members of the Austin City Council
301 W 2nd St, Austin, TX 78701

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem and Council Members:

Below please find recommendations from the City of Austin Planning Commission to the Austin City Council on the advancement and repair of housing-related criteria and amendments to the City's technical codes. The adoption of HOME Phase 1 (December 2023), and HOME Phase 2 (May 2024) marked a substantial milestone in the history of this City, in its ongoing efforts to make all types of housing attainable, efficient and more affordable to its citizens

The adoption of HOME Phase 1 (December 2023), and HOME Phase 2 (May 2024) marked a substantial milestone in the history of this City, in its ongoing efforts to make all types of housing attainable, efficient and more affordable to its citizens. Such a change, to allow more residential scale housing with a simple building permit after almost 40 years, has required a series of alterations to numerous rules and regulations across various departments. By now, almost every city department has crafted new regulations in response to HOME, including the adoption of local amendments to state or federal technical codes (e.g., fire and water), the delivery of service criteria (e.g., AE and Austin Water), or the criteria manuals required by Transportation and Watershed.

Serious concerns about the impact of these alterations on HOME's effectiveness have arisen from these new regulations, concerns so serious that if they remain unaddressed, a substantial portion of the new housing capacity envisioned by this Commission and by Council for HOME will remain locked away behind new or conflicting regulations and related costs.

Most of these changes reflect staff's earnest efforts on this matter, while some far exceeded their mandate. But each department, almost without exception, generated new criteria that added new requirements, raised costs or contradicted other regulations, the net effect of which is to reduce the ability of HOME to produce residential-scale housing, especially for third units. Examples of several of these issues can be found in the attached addendum to the resolution below.

The following recommendations are a starting point for efforts to ensure that two or three units are just as easy and cost effective to build as one unit, to simplify HOME regulations and to increase HOME's ability meet its goal of producing more housing in every neighborhood.

Therefore, Be It Resolved: The Austin Planning Commission requests that the Austin City Council take the following actions:

- Direct the Austin City Manager, by means that the Manager shall determine, to work with relevant city departments and stakeholders to harmonize The City's technical codes, ordinances and criteria manuals, eliminating contradictions and prioritizing rules or mandates to reduce regulatory barriers to HOME.
- Remove an existing loophole in the code that applies Site Plan landscaping requirements and approvals to three unit projects.
- Review and harmonize all criteria related to the installation and maintenance of trees and landscaping and reduce or eliminate the need for licensing agreements.
- Seemingly minor elements of the HOME ordinance often become the most complex or limiting in practice. Work with stakeholders to reduce complexity and increase flexibility for more units, such as:
 - Allow porches to project into the front setback.
 - Remove carports from garage placement requirements
 - Exempt single car garages from garage placement requirements (ex: row homes)
- Austin Energy now requires lengthy design and construction of infrastructure on 1-3 unit HOME projects. Evaluate methods, such as an Austin Energy Small project fee in lieu, to ensure cost effective, timely and proportionate electrical service.
- For smaller HOME units, consider reverting Austin Water's new universal water metering requirement for HOME back to the prior ADU metering policy in use before HOME.
- Review the impact of the WUI regulations on HOME projects and consolidate and simplify WUI reviews to reduce costs and allow for more rapid approvals and inspections.
- Reduce approval times within the permitting and inspection process and consolidate reviews to fewer reviewers.
- Allow the Planning Commission to make recommendations and identify conflicts between LDC changes, technical code changes and criteria manual changes to ensure they adhere to the City's housing policy goals.
- Recalibrate lot width requirements for HOME to accommodate variations in existing lot widths and allow for more efficient use of land for housing.
- Remove the redundant Building Coverage impervious cover limit for HOME projects.

- Consider allowing two units on HOME 2 small lots to substantially increase the opportunity for more affordable housing in every neighborhood.

Thank you for your continued leadership on housing. By addressing these technical barriers, the City can unlock the full potential of HOME and ensure that our shared commitment to affordability, equity, and livability becomes reality.